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ABSTRACT

Project "Freestyle" involved the development of prototypical television materials and a comic book intended to combat sex-role stereotyping in the career-related attitudes of nine to twelve-year-old children. This paper reports the results of four types of research conducted during the early development of the television series to determine the degree to which the thinking of children in the target audience is affected by sex-role stereotypes, important influences on children's sex-typed behavior, children's liking and comprehension of prototypical "Freestyle" materials, and audience reaction to the entire first pilot program and to the characters in it. The paper discusses highlights of the research results, measures used to determine audience response and to ascertain differences among different segments of the target audience, and implications of the research for development of "Freestyle" materials. Analysis of the results indicated that sex-role stereotypes are still in effect in the target audience and are supported by people designated as "significant others" in children's lives, and that the "Freestyle" message must be slanted to the needs of quite diverse audience segments. (GW)

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BASELINE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

The Baseline Studies for FREESTYLE include research during the early development of the pilots for the series. They included four waves of data collection aimed at assessing the entry level beliefs, attitudes and behaviors of the target audience and gauging their reactions to prototypical media. Basically, we wanted to build a bank of data which would help us in the later stages of the series.

These studies were conducted with a panel of 666 upper elementary school children from various ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds in the Los Angeles area during March-June, 1977. The first study was a survey administered in class. The basic research question was the current status of sex-role stereotypes.

The second study was also administered in class. It was designed to identify important influences on sex-typed behavior for the target audience.

The third wave was carried out in the audience response auditorium of the Annenberg School where children viewed and reacted to the first available version of the television series and comic book. Here, the chief purpose was to gauge liking and comprehension of the prototypical media.

The final study was also carried out with the audience response system, this time showing the first pilot in its entirety. The goal was to assess audience reactions to the pilot and to probe audience perceptions of characters in it.

The full results of these studies are too volumnious to describe in depth here, other than to mention a few highlights which were especially valuable to us as we developed FREESTYLE.

RESULTS

Study # 1 - Children's Sex-Role Stereotypes

Perhaps the broadest generalization to emerge from our first study was that sex-role stereotypes are still in full force for our target audience of nine-to-twelve year-olds. Rating the concepts "most boys" and "most girls" on sex-stereotyped personality adjectives (Guttentag and Bray, 1976), the expected differences between the sexes emerged. To some extent these differences carried over to children's perceptions of themselves, although here the differences were less pronounced. For example, most boys were perceived as rough, loud, strong and insensitive to other's feelings more than most girls.

We also found distinct sex differences in preferences for a number of childhood activities. Generally, the activities differentiating girls and boys in the present study were the same ones identified by earlier studies almost twenty years before (Rosenberg and Sutton-Smith, 1959). Boys still liked football, basketball and baseball more than girls. Girls still liked to cook, sew and play with dolls more than boys.

Traditional sex-role stereotypes also carried over to perceptions of adult jobs. Consistent with the findings of previous research five years earlier (Schlossberg and Goodman, 1972) there was generally accurate perception of the actual sex distribution in jobs. Jobs like truck driver, auto mechanic and police officer, which are traditionally reserved for males were

also perceived by both boys and girls to be so restricted. The same held for traditionally female jobs and for children's jobs as well.

These results helped us to make some basic strategic decisions about target groups and target activities. For example, it appeared that there was a hard core of boys who would be especially difficult to reach and who would require special attention. Each sex also appeared reluctant to accept the opposite sex in roles traditional for their own group. We knew we would have to soft pedal role reversal to make it palatable.

Study #2 - Patterns of Influence on Sex-Stereotyped Activities

A major strength of the original project design for FREESTYLE was the inclusion of channels through which to reach important sources of social influence in the life of the child. Accordingly, in our second study we tried to identify opportunities for utilizing various social influences to enhance the goals of the curriculum. Martin Fishbein's Expectancy Value Theory (Fishbein, 1967) was selected as the conceptual model for this effort because it considers the influence of significant others, as well as personal attitudes on behavioral intentions. We were also able to incorporate sex-role stereotypes in this model by treating them as normative beliefs.

These results are summarized in Table 1. In this table a "G" was entered into the matrix where there was a significant

TABLE 1

RESULTS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION OF ATTITUDES TOWARD THE ACT AND PERCEIVED NORMS OF TEN BEHAVIORAL INTENTIONS OF SEX-TYPED ACTIVITIES

	SOURCES OF INFLUENCE									
Behavioral Intention	I THINK	FATHER	MOTHER	BEST FRIEND	MOST BOYS	MOST GIRLS	BOYS ON TV	GIRLS ON TV	Multiple R (excluding TV referents) B	G
1. Baseball captain (M)	GB	GB	GB		GB	GB		G	.55	.66
2. Play basketball (M)	GB	GB	GB					G	.56	.60
3. Be a babysitter (F)	GB	G	B		B	G		G	.62	.57
4. Mow lawns (M)	GB	GB			GB	B	B	G	.53	.56
5. Do gymnastics	GB	GB	GB		B	G	B		.83	.64
6. Deliver newspapers (M)	GB	GB				G		G	.62	.58
7. Build model cars (M)	GB	GB	GB			B			.62	.53
8. Cook dinner (F)	GB	B	B		G	G		B	.66	.40
9. Be a club president (M)	GB	GB	GB		GB	G	B		.63	.69

beta weight ($p < .05$) for the source of influence in the prediction of a behavioral intention for girls. A "B" was entered in the matrix where there was a significant beta weight in the prediction equation for boys. We entered television referents in separate runs after combining and entering real, significant others.

The sources of influence studied were significant predictors of the intention to perform each of the sex-stereotyped behaviors. In each case, we obtained a significant overall F ($p < .05$), with multiple correlations ranging from 0.40 to 0.83. The attitude towards the act was the most important predictor of behavior. This was followed by the perceived desires of the mother and father, weighed by the motivation to comply with each. Overall, best friends and teachers did not figure prominently in predictions of the intention to perform these sex-stereotyped activities. However, it should be noted that teachers were not even included in the prediction equations due to the large amount of "I don't know" responses, indicating that children were relatively unaware of their teachers' preferences for their performance of sex-typed activities. The personal sex-role norms about what most boys and girls or boys and girls on television would do also contributed to the prediction of the intention to take part in various activities. Note that both the same-sexed and opposite-sexed norm enter in, suggesting cross-sex modelling in some cases.

On the practical level these results emphasized the necessity of using an extended cast. That is, it was clearly desirable to portray parent and teacher figures on-screen as well as peer models. By using teacher models we may have the opportunity to define normative expectations about sex-stereotyped behavior where none exist now. They also suggested that we can indeed influence change in sex-stereotyped behavior with television models.

Studies#3 and 4 - Media Reactions

The final two studies were devoted to analyzing prototypical FREESTYLE segments. The detailed results are meaningful only for those familiar with the actual series content, so here I will confine my comments to methodology and a few overall results.

Appeal Measures

Previous formative evaluations of broadcast curricula focused on attention measures as indicators of appeal, using the child's visual attendance in the presence of distraction as an index of appeal (Reeves, 1970; Rockman and Auh, 1976). However, we found evidence in the literature that this technique produces rather inconsistent results and is not an adequate index of appeal. It appears that the results of this procedure are consequences of natural patterns of environmental surveillance that are unrelated to learning or attitudes toward program content. Moreover, the FREESTYLE production budget did not allow for scene-by-scene re-shooting or re-editing to make changes dictated by distractor data.

Rather, reports of liking for media materials and their components were employed. For example, after viewing a sequence from the show, children were simply asked "How much did you like this scene?" followed by a five-point scale ranging from "like very much" to "dislike very much." This measure was calibrated by having the children rate a Bugs Bunny cartoon known to be highly popular and a soap opera known to be highly unattractive using the same rating scales. These results then acted as norms for judging the favorableness of response to other media.

To check if children were "getting the point" we asked respondents to select the perceived message of a program or program segment from four alternative responses to the question "What was this show/scene about?" In these items the "correct" answer was a paraphrase of the curriculum objective around which the sequence was constructed. For example, "Girls don't have to be lucky to win" corresponded to an objective for getting girls to rely on their own competence instead of luck. The "incorrect" alternatives were paraphrases of other curriculum objectives, stated in either positive or a negative sense, which were not intended as goals for the segments.

Generally, we obtained considerable variation in both the "liking" and "objective comprehension" measures that allowed us to make recommendations about the fate of the segments we tested. Girls liked the material better and understood it better than boys. Black and Chicano minorities liked the material more than Anglos, but comprehended it less.

Overall, the results suggested a need to be specific and concrete in Freestyle's approach to the subject matter. For example, we found that rather abstract concepts like leadership had to be made obvious if the children were to grasp them. We also learned not to aim "over the heads" of the children with themes (e.g., dating, going to a guidance counselor) that were too "old" for them to understand. It was also clear that a wide variety of formats including animation, variety skits, and dramalets would be appealing to our audience.

Character Perceptions

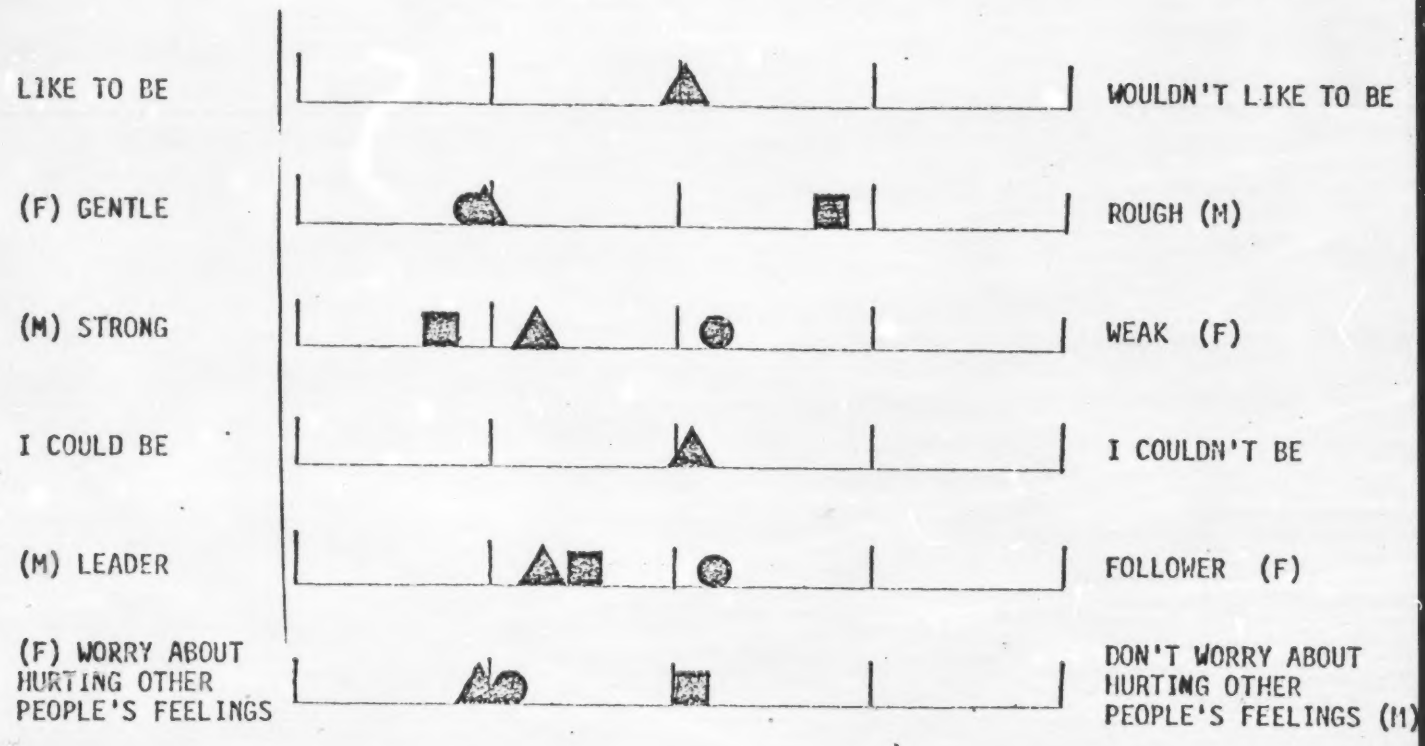
If FREESTYLE characters are to be models for behavior, they must be appealing to the target audience and be perceived by them to possess attributes of the target personality embodied in the project objecti es. We asked respondents to state their degree of liking for individual characters. We also asked them whether they would like to be like the characters and whether they possessed attributes traditionally stereotyped for one sex or the other. We did this with some of the same personality trait scales that children had rated themselves and other boys and girls on.

Generally, the main characters in the first pilot of FREESTYLE achieved their objective of portraying both stereotypical male and stereotypical female character traits, as can be seen from the example in Figure 1. This particular character was Mike Farrell, star of the M*A*S*H television series

FIGURE 1

CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF MIKE FARRELL

Character MIKE FARRELL



= TOTAL SAMPLE MEAN RATINGS OF MOST GIRLS

= TOTAL SAMPLE MEAN RATINGS OF MOST BOYS

= TOTAL SAMPLE MEAN RATINGS OF MIKE FARRELL

F = female stereotyped

M = male stereotyped

who appeared in our first pilot. We see that he was perceived to be about as gentle and sensitive as most girls, yet about as strong and as much of a leader as most boys. We also found that we could not go too far. For example, we had to be careful not to portray "anti-social" aggressive behavior with our female characters lest we begin to lose identification with them.

Audience Segmentation

The identification of audience segments that are relatively homogeneous with respect to pre-existing attitudes is an essential step in any media design problem but was especially critical for FREESTYLE with its focus on affective objectives. While sex is an obvious demographic variable which explains many of the differences in patterns of childhood activities. However, we needed to know about variations in receptivity to non-stereotyped behavior within each sex. Psychological Androgyny (Bem, 1974, 1975) is a variable which might predict this receptivity since it differentiates patterns of sex-role behavior within each sex.

Using the measures of sex-stereotyped personality traits desribed earlier, it was possible to divide the children into the following groups:

- Traditional boys and girls who describe themselves with adjectives that are stereotyped for their sex.
- Androgynous boys and girls who describe

themselves in terms of both socially valued male and female traits.

- Inverts who use characteristics usually considered appropriate for the opposite sex.

I should note that our measures were not entirely satisfactory ones from psychometric point of view. Reliabilities are poor and we now suspect that these rather abstract personality scales are too far removed from the particularistic world view of the 9-12 year old. Nonetheless, we did find some interesting variation with respect to activity preferences and other sex-stereotyped variables. For example, our "inverse" (masculine-oriented) girls liked team sports more than other girls and "inverse" (feminine-oriented) boys liked cooking and sewing more than the traditionals. We also found that the traditional numbers of each sex liked our first pilot the least and the "inverts" in each sex liked it the most.

Results like these helped lead us to design characters "targeted" for each of these audience segments to carry the message to each. It also led us to "soft-pedal" some activities. For example, we wanted to do a show on football for girls but found evidence of widespread distaste for the sport among girls except for the masculine trait oriented girls. We knew we would have to "soften" the show by making it about flag football instead of the rougher tackle or touch versions of the sport.

CONCLUSION

So, at the broadest level of generalization the Baseline Studies showed that FREESTYLE has its work cut out for it. Sex-role stereotypes are still in effect in the target audience and are supported by important significant others in the life of the child. The FREESTYLE message must be slanted to the needs of quite diverse audience segments, ranging from those who are "already there" with respect to the project goals to those who thoroughly adhere to traditional sex-role stereotypes. In any case, the Baseline Studies provided specific guidance for the development of the last two pilots and the series itself. They continue to provide background information as we attempt to further understand the limits sex-role stereotyping places on career awareness and strategies for change.

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